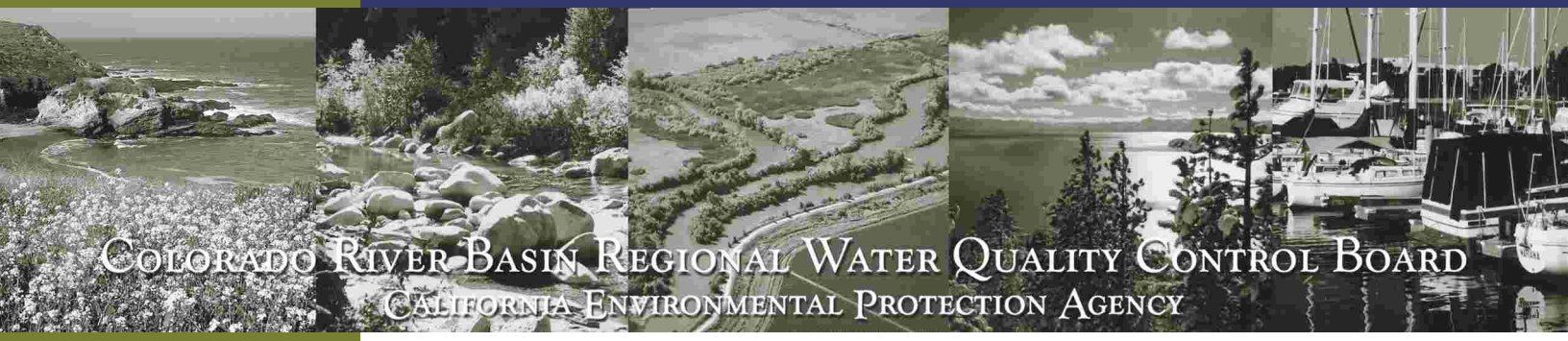
Fact Sheet



COLORADO RIVER BASIN REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD

- COLORADO RIVER BASIN REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD (REGION 7)
  73-720 FRED WARING DRIVE, SUITE 100
  PALM DESERT, CA 92260
  (760) 346-7491
  FAX: (760) 341-6820
  Info7@waterboards.ca.gov

WHERE IS COLORADO RIVER BASIN REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD?

The Colorado River Basin Region covers California's most arid area. Despite its dry climate, the Region contains two water bodies of state and national significance: the Colorado River and the Salton Sea. Water from the Colorado River irrigates more than 700,000 acres of productive farmland in the Imperial, Coachella, Bard, and Palo Verde Valleys. The river also provides drinking water to several million people in California's southern coastal cities. The Regional Board's headquarters is located in Palm Desert.

The Salton Sea Transboundary Watershed, which contains the Salton Sea, is the Region's Priority Watershed. The Salton Sea is California's largest lake and has been famous for its sport fishing and other recreational uses. It is a saline lake in a closed basin that is approximately 35 miles long and 9 to 15 miles wide, with approximately 360 square miles of water surface area and 105 miles of shoreline. The Salton Sea is also a federally and state designated repository to receive and store agricultural, surface, and subsurface drainage waters from the Imperial and Coachella Valleys. Water imported from the Colorado River has created an irrigated agricultural ecosystem in the watershed; wildlife and aquatic species are dependant on habitat created by the discharge of agricultural return flows.

KEY ISSUES IN REGION 7

The Salton Sea ecosystem, including the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge, is considered a critical link on the international Pacific Flyway for migratory birds. Freshwater inflow to the Sea is uncertain due to proposed water transfers and water conservation both in the U.S. and in Mexico. Currently, the Sea is 25 percent saltier than the ocean, with salinity increasing at approximately one percent per year. Because the Sea has no outlet, salts concentrate in it and nutrients cause the formation of eutrophic conditions where the Sea, impaired by nutrients, becomes low in dissolved oxygen, and high in ammonia levels and experiences increased odors. The Sea's salinity problem cannot be directly addressed from a strictly regulatory standpoint; rather a coordinated solution involving an engineered remedy aimed at stabilization and/or restoration of salinity levels must be developed. Catastrophic die-offs of birds and fish between 1992 and 1999 indicate the Sea is in serious trouble and may be unable to support these beneficial uses in the future.

The Regional Board plays a key role in the California Environmental Protection Agency Border Environmental Program, addressing international pollution of the New River. The staff has been instrumental in achieving cooperative, bi-national implementation of projects in Mexicali, Mexico to restore the city's sewage collection and treatment systems to satisfactory operating standards.

The Regional Board staff has set into motion a progressive enforcement program, which has resulted in increased compliance by dischargers at permitted facilities. The staff was also instrumental in the passage of state legislation prohibiting new septic tank systems near sewer hook-ups within the Mission Springs Water District service area, east of Palm Springs.

WATER DATA

- 20,000 square miles of land
- 900 miles of streams and rivers
- 250,000 acres of lakes